

His

thewanderers'wanderingdaughter

Harry Potter

Complete



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Table of Contents

[Cover](#)
[Title Page](#)
[Copyright Information](#)
[Table of Contents](#)
[Summary](#)
[Part I](#)
[Part II](#)
[Part III](#)
[Part IV](#)
[Part V](#)

Summary

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Description:

Third part to the 'His Little Bird' series. This is short, but as dark as the last ones. Non-con.

Part I

Usual Disclaimer: All Harry Potter belongs to JK Rowling. This plot is just my idea.

Final installment of the His Little Bird series in at least four parts.

These events take place a couple of months after His Persephone.

Need I remind you that this is going to be dark and angsty?

Part I

Before the final battle, the Malfoy boy had been a topic of great interest and confusion amongst Voldemort's followers. To be sure, his successful mission the year before had convinced them all he was not the coward many had assumed him to be, and more than a few were surprised he had managed to pull it off. Lucius was proud, Bellatrix more so, but Narcissa had only wanted her son to be safe.

If Voldemort was surprised that Draco had been successful he never showed it. His words to the young man had been sincere, there was potential in him and the Dark Lord had found himself strangely eager to see what would come of it if he encouraged it. With a little pruning here and there, perhaps the boy could surpass the rest of his family in both ability and rank.

In all truth the Dark Lord had intended for the boy to die in the mission. He had been eager enough before taking on the task, often accompanying his father on missions and revels even when his presence was not needed. Had he died, Voldemort would never have felt a loss, for followers he had enough. What he needed was assurance that victory would be his in the end. The daunting task, should the boy have failed, would have hurried the arrival of the final battle and shaken everyone else out of their idiotic false sense of security. But everyone had been taken by surprise when he arrived, bloodied and barely controlling his temper but victorious nonetheless.

The look he had given him then! A daring, knowing look with an upwards tilt of the corner of his lip, as if to say, *I know what you meant to do, and I beat you.*

Such insolence would never have been tolerated but the mere fact that the boy knelt there before him, *alive*, was enough to give the Dark Lord pause and he found he was... *impressed*.

Dumbledore was no longer an obstacle and he had the Malfoy boy to thank.

He had looked down at the young wizard and thought *here* was promise. Who else among all his devoted could have accomplished such a feat? Bella, perhaps, but she was wilder than the devious Fiendfyre and short of temper, Voldemort was without doubt she would have lost patience and instead choose to blast her way through the castle to complete the task. But the boy...

Bella and some of the others had been assigned to train him to the best of their ability. Luckily, Draco was in want of almost nothing; already having adapted to the nearly emotionless state long ago by influence of his father and was already adept at wandless and nonverbal magic. His skill in dueling was great. He was ruthless and conniving and it didn't take much imagination for Tom Riddle to see a little of himself in the young man with the pale hair.

The case of Narcissa's ailment worried Draco constantly—that and the Gryffindor girl. The Dark Lord himself was proficient enough in Occlumency that he could slip into others' thoughts with relative ease, unless he wished to torture his subject of scrutiny. He often studied Draco thusly and found his thoughts mostly divided between an overwhelming desire for the girl and an anxiousness regarding his mother, who grew worse with every passing day.

That Draco thought so much about the girl did not bother him. The boy needed some form of release and he had clearly chosen it in the girl, it was clear by the amount of fantasies he had built up in his head. The only problem was that the girl was not there to relieve him. There were days when Draco had showed exponential progress and there were days where the Dark Lord was disappointed. That the boy was frustrated was evident, it was soon after these trying sessions that Draco began his crimes in both Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade. This distracted him sufficiently for a while and he flourished, but they ended quickly and after his second attempt to abduct the witch failed, his performance dropped again, and the Dark Lord himself was irritated enough he was very seriously considering having the girl either killed or abducted by his own men to end it all, but Draco was transformed after that experience. Fueled by rage, by impatience and lust and so many other things, he was deemed strong enough by the Dark Lord to end his training, but his obsession with the girl had not ended. The Dark Lord himself offered assistance in capturing the girl time and time again but Draco flatly refused, intent on doing it on his own. He had been working on devising yet another plan to capture the elusive object of his lust when by a pure stroke of chance she all but came to him. That had settled matters quite nicely for everyone except the unfortunate Gryffindor, who found herself in a nightmare scenario.

Then came the trouble with Narcissa. Both Lucius and Voldemort had always known what was wrong with her—Voldemort because he was the one who had shown them the book in which the dark spell, but by both the elder Malfoy's request their son remained in the dark. Or so they both thought.

The Dark Lord had shown Draco the cause of his mother's suffering out of curiosity; wanting to know how the boy would react to the knowledge that he had been lied to all this time about the nature of his birth, and rightly so, Draco had been furious. The Dark Lord had claimed there was no way to reverse the spell or vanquish its effects but had Draco not let himself become so distraught and looked closer he would have seen there was a page missing. This page, which had been destroyed sometime earlier by the creature that held it then, held the cure.

Narcissa had been the last obstacle, the Dark Lord had thought to himself. With her gone, her son would reach his full potential. But he had failed to realize what damage the girl could do to his careful plans.

When the Granger girl was first brought to him all his stealthy attacks upon her mind were resisted ably, and he was forced to torture her in hopes of obtaining the information he wanted

so dearly. He had taken no pleasure from violating her other than the pain it caused her. This was a message without words for his protégé. However great he might become it was all because of him. As easily as Draco had gained all this power it could be taken away should he let himself become too distracted. He had already begun to suspect Draco was becoming too attached to the girl. The girl was dispensable, he wanted to make that clear. He had seen the brief alarm in Draco's eyes when he had ordered him out of the room and almost expected him to refuse.

By then the others had begun to think the Dark Lord was merely having Draco trained to become his new right hand or even a new leader amongst them, such as Lucius had once been. Draco had thought this too, especially since his Aunt Bella had confided in him that Voldemort suspected Severus was a spy. Severus himself had been keeping a low profile all that time, but swore his loyalty remained with their side. He had remained so until the final battle, during which he revealed himself by coming to the aid of the Order when both Tonks and Remus had been cornered and outnumbered by a group of five Death Eaters. The Potions Professor took them all by surprise but none more so than Remus. They had thought the occurrence had not been seen by any other but somehow word got around to the Dark Lord, who was understandably angry. After the battle Severus' headless body was found in the greenhouse, his blood covering the better part of the floor.

No one on their side had expected the Dark Lord to die. That had not been part of their plan. Very few had known about the Horcruxes. Not even Draco had been honoured with this crucial information, and yet it was through him that Hermione learned of the diadem. If not for that seemingly unimportant remark about the tiara the final battle would have had a different outcome.

Hermione had suspected it, but no one else could have imagined Harry had been the seventh Horcrux. The Dark Lord had not been able to conceal his shock upon seeing the Boy-Who-Lived rise again after being thought dead. In his last, unsuspecting moments, Voldemort realized what that meant for him. Though he still dueled Harry fiercely he did not scream with rage when the Killing Curse hit him. His last malevolent grin unsettled those who were so unfortunate as to see it but was forgotten (except by Harry, Ron and Neville) the moment his body hit the ground. Their final confrontation had been brief but would forever remain etched into the witnesses' memories and in the many written accounts that were written afterward.

Draco had not been there to see his master die. He had been so focused on bringing Hermione back to him that he had paid no attention to the happenings in the courtyard-all he could see was her. But she had escaped him again because he had let his guard down and Flitwick had found him and the second Flitwick's tiny little body had fallen to the ground he simultaneously heard the sound of Hermione Apparating away and the overjoyed, victorious cheers from the courtyard. That second of pure sound was all he needed to know his side had lost and he himself retreated before anyone else could find him, but not before entering the dim Shrieking Shack and taking Blaise's body with him.

Nothing was safe from him once he got back to the Manor. He was so angry he took it out on anything within reach. The twin defeats of the day were great and devastating to him; that his wife should slip out of his grasp yet again and that his master had allowed himself to be killed. If only he had not let himself become so distracted by following Longbottom, whom

he had found quite by accident and followed discretely, wondering why on Earth the great fool carried with him the sword of Gryffindor. Draco had watched Neville slice at something and then run off seconds later. His intent had been to follow Longbottom and kill him but to his utter amazement Hermione had appeared then and he went for the obvious choice. But now that he was alone, accompanied by Blaise's lifeless corpse and the ruins of his study he had forgotten his fury for the moment and allowed himself to think.

And think he did.

A/N:

I meant to start writing this earlier but I've been feeling so unmotivated towards writing lately. Took me ages to just start plotting this out and then typing it is a whole different story. All the same, I've figured it out now and I hope you enjoy.

We'll be hearing more on Draco next.

See you soon,

C

Part II

I own nothing and nothing owns me.

Just to be clear: The first chapter was a little insight to certain characters during His Persephone and His Little Bird. This chapter here continues some time after the last chapter of His Persephone. Implications of non-con, but nothing explicit.

Part II

Throughout her life Hermione Granger had been known to be many things. Intelligent. Brave. Strong. Successful.

‘Failure’ was one word she’d always striven to make sure she would never associate herself with.

She had lost that battle.

In failing with the one chance, she’d unknowingly secured herself more firmly to him, for now he would take no risk wherever she was concerned. If things had been bad before they were infinitely worse now; he had strengthened his grip on her so much she swore that even when she was alone she could feel it physically, like he was squeezing the air from her lungs, the very life from her body.

Weakly, her eyes fluttered shut, seeking rest. Beneath her lids, black was all she saw, but gained no relief from it. The darkness was all she had wanted; a blissful nonexistence. Freedom.

She would never have it now.

The last thing she remembered about that day was standing on the balcony. She had no memory of falling but did not need to remember to know she had done it.

After that she’d woken, believing herself dead. There had been fear-what came next? She was in utter darkness; there was no other sound save for her steady breaths as she tried to calm herself. As she slowly regained consciousness she tried to move and found that she couldn’t, to her surprise. When she looked to her side and realized her body was bound to the bed, the calm fled and was replaced by a crushing disappointment and the doubt of her success took hold of her.

In the midst of all this her own heart beat steadily rose from the static until it was the only thing she could hear; it drummed wildly in her chest like it wanted to break from the cage of her ribs to announce the last thing Hermione wanted to hear in that moment.

You’re still living.

Something else caught her attention-the green emerald flashed brightly at her from her hand, restrained as it was on the bed.

Once she might have fought against the binds that kept her still but all her energy was gone. There was a small temptation to scream and rant and curse but her voice had abandoned her, apparently. When she opened her mouth no sound came forth, and this didn't bother her. She didn't feel like talking, anyhow-what more was there to be said? There was no one to hear.

Sleep called to her. Hermione longed to submit to it, to let her mind fall blank for some precious hours but she was too uncomfortable. The binds had her spread out on the bed; vulnerable and powerless. She longed to turn onto her side but felt too weak to do it. Both her arms felt stiff and sore, her stomach rose slightly with the breaths she took.

The wait had not been long. She focused on her pulse, kept with every damning beat. It was all she could do. She'd kept her eyes on the door the whole time, fighting off the exhaustion as best as she could. His bedroom was dark and suffused with a cold that could be felt through the bedclothes she wore. She had expected him to come through the door but he came from the shadows instead, where she had not thought to look for him.

If he'd been there the whole time she couldn't know. Her eyes turned to him and her breath hitched for one brief second before she forced herself to keep breathing, however uncomfortable she felt under his frighteningly calm gaze.

His voice was hoarse, yet as fierce and cold and sharp as steel, just as she had always known it.

"You will *never* do that again. I forbid it."

Hermione made no reply. Her gaze floated up to the ceiling.

The bed dipped under his weight. Helpless, her body shifted towards him.

"That was *extremely* reckless of you, Hermione. If it weren't for the charms I put on the ring you would not be alive now."

What did you think I meant to do, then? She longed to ask, but deemed it better to remain silent.

"I caught you before you could hit the ground," he went on. "The ring slowed you down but I had to stop you completely with magic."

His words hit her like a physical blow, knocking the breath from her lungs.

Of all the things he could have said this cut her most deeply. To have gone so far only to learn she had not even come close to her goal.

I never even hit the ground.

Suddenly she was free-her limbs dropped down to rest on the bed and a small groan of relief stuck in her throat, but died quickly as he enshrouded her with his arms, stroking her wherever he could reach in a feverish manner, as if he was checking she was well and truly there and not just a figment of his imagination. Hermione's body jolted at the touch and she whimpered softly, but gave no resistance.

"Don't you dare ever try to leave me again," he ordered. "That was the last time you break your promise, I swear it. I won't allow you to die. I forbid it."

That silly comment rankled her somewhat, even in her apathetic state. How would he achieve that? Prevent her from killing herself, yes, but this was beyond his control. There was a brief absurd thought that he might create a Horcrux for her but she was firmly persuaded he would never take such a path. Then again, he'd surprised her before.

'I forbid it.'

Delusional fool.

He could play God all he wanted, but the fact remained that he was just as human as she, and for the only time that night, she found comfort.

His hands locked around her wrists like manacles. Hermione couldn't find the strength to pull away.

Three times she had tried to escape and twice she had failed. The one time she had succeeded she had made the mistake of going just where everyone would suspect her to go: to her friends; her family. That was where he found her, and they were the ones he'd threatened to kill unless she gave herself to him. Hermione knew now she should have gone elsewhere-anywhere but the Burrow, where her mere presence put those she loved in danger. It was a mistake she would never make again.

The only problem was now there would never be another chance. It was certain as the sun would rise in the morning. The heavy thought settled inside her, weighing her down. Draco's arms held her in place where she fell apart, chaining her to him with his embrace.

His lips were warm as they pressed against hers, parting open her mouth to suck lightly at her bottom lip. Feebly, Hermione turned her head away, struggling to breathe.

Gods, she hated him touching her. All she had wanted was to be free from this. Why couldn't he just have let her perish? Why did he want her to suffer so?

"Don't fight me," he said softly. "I won't hurt you."

The feeling was barely returning to her arms. Hermione could hardly stir let alone push him away. Pressed tightly against him, his heat transferring into her body, Hermione longed to cry, but no tears came forth. He made her promise over and over again she would never leave him; and she had made no notion of agreeing to it, which he took as her acceptance.

"I know you're unhappy," he murmured to her. "I'm sorry it came to this, I am-but I couldn't live without you, Hermione-I need you with me."

You're being selfish, she wanted to shout. I don't care what you need-let me have what I want. Let me free or let me die. For once, just give me what I want.

The words remained locked behind her lips, and having nowhere to go, settled deep inside her, hardened and dull. How many times had she told him these things already? He was right-his lesson had finally sunk in. It would never happen, and she had learned not to waste her words.

"I'm going to take care of you, okay?" He pressed a kiss to her cheek, the tip of her nose. "I'll get you through this. The world will be ours."

The days after that were a blur. Hermione didn't remember much afterwards but Draco told her she had spent most of nearly every day in bed, asleep. Dimly, she remembered the smell of her unwashed hair, the feeling of Draco's arms around her as he lowered her into the bathtub, the warm water within. For a long period of time she'd remained that way-but Draco insisted it had only lasted for two weeks. To Hermione it felt like years. It was so easy to sleep all day and night. Her mind had grown dark and shadowed and the only thing she could manage to do without breaking down again was sleep. Sleeping kept the pain away. It kept her from facing him. It was some kind of strange mercy that during all this time he did not touch her.

Later he told her how he'd feared she might lash out at him again, but she'd remained still and silent, except the few times she allowed herself to cry. And the days kept passing and she lost hope.

Since that first desperate, desolate day something had been destroyed inside her, she had lost something vital to herself, and wondered if it would ever make any difference should she ever regain it. Escape was no longer possible; she didn't even bother to try looking for any new way out, if there were any. Draco did not let her out of his sight, he took her with him almost everywhere he went in the Manor, unless he decided he needed privacy for one thing or another then the new House Elf was to attend to her. Hermione spent the days reading, but her attention could never stay focused on the words before her for too long; often she found herself staring at empty space with nothing but silence filling her mind. Thinking of her friends was too painful, of Harry and her parents hurt worse so she avoided that as best as possible.

When she grew tired of reading she walked. She was not yet allowed to go outside again, at Draco's command she'd been barred from so much as pushing one toe past the doors. Once he saw fit to do so, he would allow her to tread as much ground as she liked, but for now this was to be endured, so she was condemned to pace away her agonies inside the Manor, but large as it was she felt extremely confined, and felt she was only growing worse.

They ate all their meals together, they spent nearly all their time together, and they slept together. Hermione began to have trouble remembering what it was like to be truly alone, in the way she had been before she had been kidnapped. To be alone in the manner that she could do whatever she wanted without a pair of eyes watching her always, to feel like herself again.

Now the Dark Lord was dead, there was no one to summon Draco away at any odd hour. With his mother and father laid to rest there was no one to visit. There was no Blaise to come and speak to Draco, to make jokes.

When the silence grew too great to bear Draco had Hermione sing for him. Hermione would have preferred not to-singing never gave her pleasure anymore, but he gave her no choice. Nor comfort, for that matter. Lonely, lovely and sad, her voice would fill the great house and his ears-just her voice was enough to remind them how lonely they were. Neither had much learning in any instrument-Hermione at first scoffed at Draco's purchase of a grand piano and his intense desire to learn to play it, but as she had not much else to do, found herself learning little by little, but only when he was occupied with something else. For long stretches of time she would sit there and play for as long as she was able, even if she missed notes or made fumbled her way through, because playing eased her mind better than sleep

could, somehow. While playing she only had time to focus on the sheet music, on her hands, on the sound. There was no time for anything else so she became a slave to the instrument until Draco decided it was enough for the day.

Draco often spoke of them going someplace else.

“Where would you like to go?” he’d ask as they sat in his study, gesturing towards a map he’d spread out on the coffee table. “Perhaps we could live in France for some time? Or would you rather visit America? It’s been many years since I visited Italy. What do you think sweetling?”

“I don’t care,” she said each time. He knew where she truly longed to be, and yet they would never go there, so there was no point in asking anymore.

Neville and the others would never come, this much she knew. It could be years before she got another chance. What was there left to do? She was not herself anymore; this became more apparent with every passing day. Draco kept his word and never made her drink Amortentia again, but still a change manifested and she had become someone else.

There had been some strange days when Draco had cooped himself up in his study for hours, scribbling away on torn pieces of parchment, poring over ancient, nearly unreadable books with faded, incomplete illustrations. In the past Hermione would have been worried; fearful even, but now she was curious at best, and found herself relieved at the loss of his company, however short its duration may have been. On those days he kept the door to his study shut with nothing but a strip of light underneath it to show he was inside, and she was left to do as she pleased with Joffy the House Elf accompanying her.

Then one afternoon he had left with a strange gleam in his eye, and returned visibly triumphant, holding a wand she was sure was not his and she’d never seen before but felt vaguely familiar when she looked at it. She found herself wondering who he had taken it from, if he had taken a life to acquire it—was this what he had been after? It was only a wand after all. When he told her about it, (the Elder Wand, it was called) and its origin, she couldn’t help but laugh. It was the silliest thing she’d heard in a long time; she couldn’t believe that he believed the story to be true. But when he told her from which grave he had taken it her scornful laughter had stopped at once.

He used the wand that night to keep her from resisting him when he touched her, and had no qualm about sharing how else he had desecrated their former Headmaster’s tomb, which only added to Hermione’s nightmares.

After that he began spending more time in his study, writing notes and drawing up plans for something big. Hermione didn’t know what any of it was for, everything was charmed so she could not read it, but she dreaded it just the same. He began to create his own Potions laboratory in a spare room, fortifying the walls and adding protective enchantments all around in case of an accident.

With all this another cloud of dread settled over Hermione, who knew he’d decided it was time to take the next step. The Elder Wand had done this, it had spurred his actions and Hermione sensed nothing good would come of it.

To keep herself from stewing in worry for too long Hermione found other things to do. There were some Ancient Runes books in the back of the library that she found by chance one

day, and other books in different languages, so she took it upon herself to translate those which she could to the best of her ability. She drew maps though she wasn't very good at it, and practiced the piano more fervently. She asked Joffy for tools for gardening and busied her nervous hands with soil and fertilizer and tiny, fragile little seeds.

After a while she had to stop, however. It reminded her too much of Neville. If she thought of Neville then Harry would come soon after, and she was desperate to not think of them, so she ceased her gardening efforts, and the little shoots that had begun to sprout withered quickly.

Draco had remembered her hobby of knitting and supplied her with tools to make whatever she desired. Hermione busied herself making afghans and throws and long, heavy jumpers-anything to keep her fears away. Everything she made was for herself until Draco took a liking to a green turtleneck she'd recently finished and wore it once or twice, then asked her to make more. Hermione didn't dare refuse-with the wand at his side he'd grown stronger, and more dangerous. He had not hit her once since her attempt at ending her life, but no matter what he'd promised Hermione did not want to invoke his anger over something as trivial as this, so she did as he asked, though she resented him for it with every click of her needles.

That was only on the days she felt like being productive, however. Most days Hermione felt too tired to do anything. At Draco's insistence she would drag herself out of the bed and dress herself, but would fall asleep again once breakfast was over, during which she scarcely touched her food. Reading and all her other hobbies were done for the sake of doing something, for depressed as she was enough of her old self remained that she could not bear to be idle. But as it happened, quite often she found herself with little energy to do anything but sleep. This was a means of escape that required hardly any effort, and she did it often and gladly, but once awoken her moods turned sour once again.

Months passed in this manner, and at the end of the sixth Hermione began to sense that Draco's plans were near to becoming reality, if it not already begun. Though he told her nothing about this, it was not hard to guess-there was a fierce, determined air to him as of late and she knew it was only a matter of time. In turns he grew excited and impatient, annoyed and withdrawn. Whatever he had planned, it was obvious he was sure of his own victory and she found herself with the savage, mean hope that someone, preferably Harry, come and strike him down at last.

A/N:

This was a long time in coming. Sorry for the wait.

Part III

All related to Harry Potter belongs to JK Rowling.

Part III

[one month later.]

The winds howled and the open sky grew steadily darker above him, blanketing everything in shadows. There was a sharp snapping sound around him as his cloak flapped wildly in the mighty gales, more than once he had to push it away from his face to keep it from blocking out his sight. The rubble under his feet shifted and scattered quietly as he moved through the ruins, taking in the wreckage.

All the empty cells gaped back at him, eerily illuminated by the moonlight that peered timidly at him from behind the rolling clouds. The remains of the iron barred doors, which he had blasted to pieces shortly after his arrival lay strewn about the floor or by force of his magic were impaled into the wall; their jagged, broken ends stared menacingly at him as he passed by.

The former occupants of the cells had left only moments ago, after he had spoken to them and they fell to their knees to pledge their loyalty to him. That they had done eagerly, rushing forward in droves to grasp reverently at his cloak, to touch their dirty mouths to his boots, murmuring their gratitude to their newly risen Lord, their Savior. The Dementors gave them no trouble, of that he had made sure some time ago. Once he had arrived they disappeared, off to some other place, to await his next summons. The guards, sparse as they were, had been dealt with swiftly—at least, the ones that hadn't been maimed by the flying debris.

He took another look around, relishing his victory for a few seconds before backing away.

It was time to move on before unwanted company arrived. There was more needed to be done. Draco turned away, and vanished with a muted *crack*.

Joffy waited on him the moment he arrived, taking his cloak and heavy robes silently.

“How is she?”

The creature shook his head. Draco envisioned her the way he'd seen her before he'd gone, curled into a ball beside him, wrapped tightly in heavy sheets, hiding her face from him. When he pushed her hair aside to better see her face she didn't respond, but flinched when he kissed her good-bye.

“Is she ready?”

“Yes, Master,” Joffy said in a high voice.

Good.

“Leave me,” he said. The elf squeaked in reply and bowed before going away.

As he climbed up the stairs he pulled off his thick black jumper and carried it the rest of the way. His skin rose in gooseflesh at the sudden warmth in his home, a stark contrast to the biting Autumn winds that howled outside.

When he entered his room he began to wave his hand to light up room but there was no need. Although weak, the light coming through the great stained-glass window was enough to illuminate the bedroom.

Immediately his eyes found her in the semi-darkness, and he smiled, pleased. For all she claimed to hate that window she spent a good deal of time there huddled in the seat at its base. It made him happy to know she appreciated it, if only a little. She would need whatever comfort it gave her in the times to come.

And him. He would give her comfort too, for she would always have him no matter what she said.

The silver food tray glinted dully when he passed it-the food was half-eaten and the corner of his mouth twitched upwards as he looked into the empty teacup on the bedside table. Straightening his mouth, he moved on.

Sometimes, when he left her in Joffy's care he would come to the bedroom to find the patient elf standing silent at the window whilst his wife brooded or slept. When she slept, she sometimes ended up with her palms pressed against the cool glass, her head bowed reverently, as if praying during slumber. A strange sight-it stirred the faintest whispers of pity inside him, but he pushed those aside quite easily. She could pray all she wanted but that would change nothing.

There were no gods; she would learn that soon enough. More time was all she needed-if she still had not grown accustomed to her situation (which he doubted-she'd always been a quick learner) then he would help her learn. It was high time she accepted this, accepted him.

With these thoughts in mind he made his way towards the window where his wife watched him with shrouded eyes, concealing what she felt beneath a veneer of indifference. It was another tactic she had developed, one of many that aggravated him. He cared nothing for this false mask; he wanted the fear, the hate and misery that lay beneath, not this blank face. Not only that, he wanted her happiness. He wanted her love. Anything she had to offer, he wanted, and he would have it.

To test her, he rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, then reached down and undid his belt slowly. The clinking of the metal prongs was the only sound in the room, amplified in her ears and muted to his.

There it was. Fear flickered in her eyes and she drew back instantly, pressing herself against the glass.

He smiled.

After the news of the second mass breakout in Azkaban was relayed, everyone broke into worried whispers and wondered who could have done it.

"The *second*. Merlin," Fred said, "Voldemort's gone. Who else has got that much power?"

“Not a single dementor to be seen. All abandoned their posts-d’you think they’ve joined forces with the other side again? But why? There’s no one to lead them.”

“They’ll be comin’ after us! Best to raise the wards again!”

“It’s him,” his voice cut through the rest of the voices and they died out rapidly.

The others stared at him. Many of them looked worried.

“Harry...” Mr. Weasley began, but was cut off by Ginny, who had elbowed him.

“I’m not crazy,” Harry said. “I’m not.”

Headmistress McGonagall cleared her throat. “Potter, no one has made that claim.”

Ron spoke up from beside Harry. “We know it’s him, Professor.” Neville and Ginny nodded.

The aged Headmistress peered at them intently over her half-moon spectacles.

“You were there when the body was discovered,” she stated.

“Yes.”

On the last days of the Hogwarts cleanup, which had lasted around a month, Draco Malfoy’s body had been discovered in ruined Room of Requirement. Fred, George and Harry had stumbled upon the corpse, half hidden by a pile of broken chairs, and they had immediately summoned the Headmistress.

Everyone was relieved at the find. No one knew who had killed him but it didn’t matter as long as he was dead. Only Harry, Ron and Neville had been suspicious. They could not readily believe it would have ended so easily as this.

“You were there when it was positively identified as Draco Malfoy’s body.”

Harry clenched his jaw.

“Yes, Professor. But that wasn’t Draco Malfoy.”

Some of the members of the Order groaned, others listened more intently. This was not the first time they had heard this exchange. Harry often brought it up, claiming something was not right, but because he had no evidence at the time many found it difficult to believe him. Something felt different this time, though, and they wondered if they would finally have answers. McGonagall unfolded her arms and stood straighter.

“We’ve been through this before, Potter. Have you any evidence to support your claim?”

Neville stepped forward. “I saw it with my own eyes, Professor.”

She looked at him sharply. “When? Where?”

“In his dungeons the night Hermione disappeared, I think. There was two of him. One was dead, and I heard him say it was Blaise Zabini under Polyjuice Potion.”

There was silence around the room as the assembled group processed the information.

“Granger disappeared *seven* months ago, Longbottom. Why didn’t you tell us sooner?” Her voice was the sharpest anyone had ever heard it, and everyone struggled not to wince.

“I was Obliviated,” he said, looking sorry. “Malfoy did a number on me with that spell-I’ve had to fight to remember what I could, it only ever came back in bits and pieces-I wasn’t sure I even believed it at first-if I myself couldn’t believe it, who would believe me?”

“Why was Malfoy holding you prisoner in the first place?”

Now Neville looked lost. “I-I don’t know.”

“We think Malfoy’s the one who took his ear,” Ron said.

“But *why*?”

Now Harry spoke up again. “To get Hermione to go back to him.”

McGonagall looked worried. She turned to Neville. “You have no recollection of seeing or speaking to Miss Granger whilst you were held prisoner?”

“No, ma’am. I’ve tried to remember everything that happened that day, but I think he cursed me too, after he Obliviated me. Every time I think I come across something new I black out, and it takes weeks to get to that point again. The only face I remember seeing is his, both dead and alive.”

“You think she went back to him to save you? That he used you as hostage?”

Neville reached up to where his ear should have been. “Yes.”

“Did he say anything about Mr. Zabini? Did he confess to killing him?”

“Not that I can remember.”

The Professor reached up to touch the brooch at her neck. “You think he still has Miss Granger.”

Harry nodded.

“Hold on,” Dean Thomas broke in, “I thought she ran away by herself?”

“That’s what we thought at first, but it doesn’t make sense. We were going to help her find her parents,” Tonks said. “Why would she have gone alone? And *why* leave her wand behind?”

“That and the fact that we found Neville wandering around the Burrow a day later,” Ron added. “Didn’t know why he was there, what he’d been doing, where he’d been in the past few days. Both him and Hermione disappearing within days of each other was strange, especially when Neville came back short one ear.”

“We were sure it was Malfoy at first until the body was found. That made us think maybe we were wrong, until Neville started remembering.”

The Professor looked at the three of them in turn.

“This is quite a lot of speculation we are dealing with.”

“We know, Professor, but it’s all we have. Besides,” Harry said, drawing something out from his pocket, “I think we can prove it.”

Everyone peered curiously into his open palm, expecting to see some damning sort of evidence. A photograph, a vial with a recent memory of the accused to prove he was not dead.

What they saw instead was a rusted key.

[three months later]

Rodolphus, Crabbe and Goyle had left minutes ago, and Draco finally had everything he needed. Making sure to handle the items carefully, he deposited them safely into his makeshift Potions lab, locked and warded the room, and went on his way to the bedroom. The hour was late, the meeting had been abrupt and unplanned, but such items were not easily come across and were like to be tracked down if they remained with his men for too long a time. This, coupled with recent events, had him well pleased. Things were falling into place, as they should.

His eyes were heavy with exhaustion. Draco found himself wondering if Voldemort had ever needed sleep-he wasn’t quite human, was he? Draco had never seen him eat, either. Perhaps he should have asked Aunt Bella when he still had the chance-she might have known.

Undressing himself with a flick of his hand, Draco entered the bedroom quietly, not wanting to wake Hermione should she be asleep. The notion was wasted, however, as he found her quite awake at her window.

She looked like a goddess, wearing that white dress and sitting in the light. There were parts of her hair that glowed in the weak, rainbow tinted light and danced along her pale skin and he was enthralled at the sight of her.

But as he stepped closer he could see her shoulders shaking slightly, the unhealthy pallor of her skin, consequence of both her confinement and her emotional state for the past months. Both would be changed soon, he assured himself.

Another step and he was directly behind her, his front grazed her shoulder blades.

Her shoulders shook harder, he could hear her dry breaths quicken, and then he realized she was speaking.

He strained his ears to hear properly, she was speaking so quietly.

“Please,” she was whispering. “Draco.”

He brought himself closer, and his hands rested on her shoulders, which he noticed were now rigid, held stiffly to ward off the shaking. Her skin was cold, when he reached around and bent forward to kiss her, he found her lips were dry and cracked but still warm above all, her eyes had been closed but once he’d touched her they had flown open and she stared, unseeing into the glass.

He caressed her neck with his nose, inhaling her unique scent. The smell of lavender hung heavy in her hair, it lingered on her skin.

"Please what, little bird?" he brushed his lips against her throat. She didn't turn away. "What is it you want?"

"Let me out." His hands tightened in her hair and she drew a shaky breath. "Please. I want to see the sun. I want to go *home*."

He didn't say anything, only turned her head to the side and kissed the corners of her mouth, licking at the tears neither had realized she was shedding.

"Think what you're doing, I'm not ready... I don't want this! Not with you, *never* with you..."

Draco brushed her tears away gently with one hand, the other reached across her to hold her waist.

"Please, Draco, please don't make me do this. Don't, d-don't." The rest of her plea was rendered almost incoherent by her sobs.

"Don't cry, sweetheart," he murmured softly. "We've talked about this."

Hermione shook her head, wrestled against his hold. "You *tricked* me!"

What a fool she had been, a great big fool. She had woken up so thirsty that day, and never thought how strange it was that Joffy was already there waiting with a cup of tea when tea was usually brought along with breakfast hours later. The elf didn't have to insist she finish it, Hermione downed it as fast as she could to relieve her throat.

No one had told her that her tea had been spiked with a fertility potion. And when Draco came home...

Draco always performed a Contraceptive charm in the beginning, then took to having her take it in potion form through her food-that way she would not dream of starving herself-it was either eat and be safe one day more or risk falling pregnant.

With everything that had happened lately she had allowed herself to hope that he had abandoned that desire, that perhaps, upon seeing the state he had driven her to, he would let her in peace in that respect but she had been wrong, so wrong...

What had happened to her? She should have suspected, should have known!

His hands were on the swell of her belly now, fingers spread over the mound that would continue to grow in the coming months. She had not suspected anything was wrong until later that night, and she'd confronted him as best as she could, tried locking herself into the bathroom, tried ridding herself of his unwanted gift. There were no razor blades she could use, no rope or wand, nothing but water. The water surrounded her in the confines of the tub, stroking her with the steam that rose up from its depths.

She had not been under surface for long when she was pulled back out savagely and crushed against his trembling body.

Don't you dare, his eyes said to her. *Don't you ever dare*.

Since then she was never alone again when near water. In fact, if things went the way she knew Draco hoped they would, she would never be alone again.

Her protruding belly almost disgusted her. She could barely stand to look at it for long, let alone touch it. He'd taken her body from her-she might still have control of herself but in the end she had no decisions left to make, almost no say in what happened, and she hated him for it.

Hermione pressed her palm to her mouth to stifle her grief, almost faint with rage.

Hermione thought of the child she was being forced to carry, and wondered if she could ever love it. What if the child grew up to be just like his father? Fear constricted her throat-Draco wanted a boy, what if it wasn't?

If Harry knew, would he still love her?

It wasn't fair. It just wasn't. What had she done to warrant such misery? Which gods had she angered, that they would allow this to happen? She was sure she had been a good person before her capture-what was she now, that she had given up?

It wasn't that she had given up, exactly. She simply had no choice. No power. And that just made it worse.

She tried to stifle her sob, but her lips parted and an anguished little moan escaped her instead.

Draco felt her moan vibrate in her throat and he picked her up carefully. He laid her down on the bed and settled over her, stealing hard, possessive kisses from her lips. She turned her head away; tears nestled in the corner of each eye.

"You'll be a good mother, I know it," he said as he nipped her ear. She jerked at the pain.

"Please, just listen to me!" she clutched at his arm. "You're making a mistake. Neither of us is capable to raise a child... especially you."

For a brief second Draco looked like he might strike her, she flinched when he brought himself closer to her.

"That may be, darling, but that doesn't mean we can't learn. There's no going back now." His hands pulled up her skirt, then busied themselves pulling the fabric aside on her chest to reveal a naked breast. His thumb circled her areola softly, and Hermione reached up to grab his hand.

"Draco," she breathed, trying to make him see sense one last time, "*please*. This is going to affect us both, can't you see that? A child-with everything you've done, everything you're going to do, it isn't safe..."

"You will always be safe with me," he assured her, falling silent to wrap his mouth around her nipple, laving at it with his tongue just the way he'd learned she liked it. Against her will, her nipple stiffened. Hermione's head fell back on the bed and she bit her lip to keep from crying out as his hand snaked up between her thighs. "Whatever I do in the future will only add to that, darling bird, remember that. Trust me."

"With you I am never safe," she insisted, and pressed his hand against her tummy. "This is proof."

Draco silenced her by pressing his lips against hers.

Once he had finished Draco rolled onto his side, and gently slung a protective arm across Hermione's middle, holding her close to him.

Hermione looked into his face; asleep, he appeared angelic. The picture of the perfect husband, the kind anyone could hope for. Until he opened his eyes she could pretend he was, but she could never pretend, for the truth was too real. Briefly, she had the urge to stroke his cheek; she wondered what he would do if she did, and how quickly he would react if she raked at his eyes with her nails, if she tried to smother him with her pillow, squeeze the life from his body with her bare hands.

He never spoke of Lucius, or his upbringing, and Hermione dared not speak of Narcissa, not after what happened last time, which led her to wonder. Had his childhood been full of fear and terror and hate, or as unremarkable as hers had been, up until she received her Hogwarts letter?

Can a monster be a good father?

She didn't know. She didn't *want* to know. She didn't want to be in this situation, period.

Trust me.

The words made her want to rock with laughter-she would have, if she had dared.

Yes, she thought angrily. *Trust the man who is forcing you to carry his child. Trust the man who has done all this to you.*

Her arms folded across her stomach, careful to avoid his. Just feeling the distended bump made her face contort with sadness but she kept herself from letting the tears fall.

It isn't fair, she thought again. *It isn't, but that isn't your fault. You didn't ask for this, and neither did I, but I promise that to my last breath I will keep you safe from him.*

A/N:

For those of you wondering, yes, Hermione knows about what happened at Azkaban, and Draco hasn't told her yet but she's figured out what he's doing. (The Order hasn't found out yet about Draco's grave robbing.)

To explain why Neville can remember about being in the Manor despite being Obliviated: Draco focused more on erasing his memories of seeing Hermione there before he was released. Draco obscured everything else to give himself time; what memories Neville has from being prisoner were left there for a reason.

Part IV

I don't own Harry Potter.

Probably too late now but the song for this fic is *Talking Bird* by Death Cab For Cutie. Lyrics (below) are theirs not mine.

*“and the longer you think the less you know what to do.
It's hard to see your way out when you live in a house in a house
'Cause you don't realize the windows were open the whole time
But oh, my talking bird,
Though your feathers are tattered and curled,
I'll love you all your days,
'til the breath leaves your fragile frame
It's all here for you
As long as you choose to stay,
It's all here for you
As long as you don't fly away.”*

Part IV

[one month later]

“COME OUT FROM WHERE YOU ARE!” Harry shouted, his voice doubly amplified by the Sonorous. **“YOUR LAND IS SURROUNDED, MALFOY! IT'S OVER; SURRENDER OR WE WILL DRAG YOU OUT.”**

There were heavy traces of magic all around him; so heavy it felt like he was moving through a current, fighting to go forward. How was this possible? Even Hogwarts, with its plethora of enchantments, never felt like this and was surely more complicated and yet here everything around him felt so... oppressive.

He wasn't the only one who felt it. When he looked across the room he caught the uneasy expressions on the other's faces. Ron nodded at him from where he stood with Fred and George. Everyone was on their guard and alert, ready for anything.

It was all happening so quickly, Harry thought. But if luck was on their side, Malfoy would not notice his security wards had been breached. The specialists from the Ministry had worked on those weeks, doing it so gradually so the intrusion would hardly be noticed. Harry had loathed that they'd had to go about it so slowly. Impatience was burning him alive. Now

it was the dead of night, and they were covered by Silencio's. There were so many of them any small sound might give them away if they weren't careful. The rest of the Order was assembled into groups, waiting for the signal to begin to search the great house. Cursebreakers and Ministry Officials alike were already occupied in breaking down whatever curses and wards might prevent them from completing their mission, their mouths moved but no sound reached him. Professor McGonagall was at the front, beside Remus and Tonks and Mad-Eye. When he nodded, everyone exploded into action.

"Hermione!" Harry bellowed, making his way up to the second level. He felt a little dizzy though he wasn't out of breath-why? Holding his wand before him, ready for an attack, he blasted and kicked down door after door to behold mostly empty rooms. The rush of noise from below reached his ears but he heard none of it save for the pounding of his heart as he came upon a door that was slightly ajar, and the uneasiness only grew worse. As he inched closer he wondered if he should call for backup but it was too late since he'd already pushed the door open to confirm his fear that the room was

Empty.

A violent oath slipped past his lips and he scanned the space; the strange stained window, the rumpled bedding, the dark furnishings, the near empty walls. The adjoining bathroom was clear; when he looked through the dressers and the closet they were both empty.

There was a normal level of dust, but no matter how much there was everything he'd seen so far only proved one thing.

They've gone.

Pushing a hand through his hair, Harry went back to the bed. The others had caught up by now-he could hear them going through the rooms he hadn't got to yet farther down the hall, reciting incantations to break down the protective enchantments they found. Surprisingly, he found himself a little hesitant to approach the window. It looked familiar but he couldn't place where he'd seen one like it before. Perhaps in a Muggle church somewhere. Aside from the usual protective enchantments there was nothing abnormal about the small space, but still he lingered there for a moment more, unsure what to think. None of this was what he had expected.

Feeling a little lightheaded, Harry grasped the nighttable before him, pressing a palm to his forehead.

Was this some sort of trap? It was so hard to *breathe*. Were the others experiencing it too? Worry gnawed at him. Whatever it was, he had to *move*, he was wasting time. Harry took a second to suck in a few mouthfuls of air and moved on.

A closer look at the bed revealed both pillows had indents in them where someone had lain their head. As he neared it his nose caught scent of something familiar. It wasn't very strong, but it was just enough to know Hermione had been there-her scent was unmistakable. Harry ripped the sheets away from the bed, sweeping his green eyes across the white expanse of the bed but again, he found nothing.

What were you looking to find? A voice asked him drily. Chains? Blood?

Frustration welled up inside him, and he threw the covers back down in anger, fighting the shiver that the eerie atmosphere of the room stirred in him. All he had to rely on the fact that Hermione had been there was her scent and that wouldn't be enough for the others as proof- they would say it was his mind playing tricks on his head because he was so desperate to find her, that Malfoy had made the scent somehow to trick him, but Harry knew better.

It was her.

He just needed more proof. This time he targeted the pillows, taking one and inspecting it carefully with his gloved hands, searching in the fabric cases for a hair, an eyelash, a bit of dead skin, *something*.

That something came to him in the second pillow, in the form of a long brown hair. Harry's knees went weak with relief and horror.

Hermione. Gods. Where did he take you now?

They could be anywhere by now. Malfoy could have hidden them both with double the protection he had bestowed onto this house, and it would take ages to find them again.

Harry took a tissue from the bathroom, and placed the hair inside it carefully before folding it and tucking it inside his coat carefully. It wouldn't do to lose it; this was all the proof they had, besides Neville's spotty memories. Where they found Hermione, they would find Malfoy, and Harry above everyone else looked forward to having him pay for his grievous crimes in the worst way possible. Harry let his wand arm drop to his side at last, and went to exit the room, the image of the twisted sheets burned into his mind.

Everything else had been neat and orderly except for the bed. Nothing more was out of place. That had been intentional. Harry was willing to bet all the gold in his vault that Malfoy had left it that way on purpose.

He wants to get under your skin. Don't let him.

Still, the image remained stuck in his mind as he kept going, and joined the others on the main floor.

Breathe, he reminded himself as he walked. Remember to breathe.

Many of them were still searching, but by now he knew what was just dawning on them. Harry didn't look at any of them; he didn't want to see what expressions they bore as they moved around him.

Empty. It's all empty. We didn't get here fast enough.

Perhaps he was wrong. Perhaps they'd only gone somewhere else and hadn't yet returned, but that wasn't true. They had been there, for how long he didn't know, but it was clear they had. He ground his teeth together, thinking of the unmade bed, its rumpled sheets, the pillows so close together. Did he make Hermione sleep with him every night? Or did he keep her locked up in the dungeons, as he did to Neville? Most importantly, was she okay? Malfoy had resorted to taking a hostage and an ear to lure her back. *The bastard faked his own death.* Why?

Harry couldn't fathom what Hermione must have gone through when she realized he was still alive. How had she found out? It pained him to think how angry Malfoy must have been

with her for running away-he'd beaten her before, had he done it again once she was back with him? Someone had raised the possibility of Hermione being dead, which Harry refused to think about. They all had to be prepared, that was the argument, but Harry knew with almost certainty that no corpse would be found in the hiding house.

He'd been right. No body was found. Absolutely nothing, so far, and it was crushing.

They'd made so much progress in the past months, *finally* locating where Malfoy lived, through the key Neville had found, approaching in secret to see what kind of spells protected his hideout, which none of them expected to be as grand as it really was. But he was a Malfoy -they should have expected it. Normally they would have taken more time to break into the Manor to be safe, as they didn't know if their spells would work, but there was no time to waste; Malfoy's destruction of the wizard prison had them running to catch up, since they didn't know what he would do next, and they were working to beat the clock and find Hermione before things got worse.

For all their haste, they still had come too late and Hermione would suffer for it.

Harry found Ron and a few others in the library, which was strangely devoid of any reading material. The sight of the grand, empty bookcases was what made everything click into place.

He knew we were coming, Harry thought bitterly. It made sense. *He knew long before even we did. That's how he had time to take everything with him.*

Professor McGonagall looked tired and worn. Neville stood farther away from the rest, staring at a blank wall. Ron paced around the room. Tonks and Mad Eye were still combing through the Manor while Remus, the twins and Ginny went to look through the upper levels. The rest were still working on entering a certain room on the third level, which was heavily warded.

"It's empty," he said, and they nodded silently, avoiding his gaze. "He knew we were coming, and took everything. He's gone somewhere else."

"Merlin," Ron sighed, rubbing his temples. "What a bloody nightmare."

"But how could he have known?" The Professor asked angrily. "We were all sworn to secrecy on this, everything has been conducted in stealth and with the utmost care."

"Could he be spying on us?" Neville asked. Everyone looked around uneasily.

"Let's hope not."

"It's a bit hard to breathe, isn't it?" Ron asked. He was paler than usual, sweat dotted his forehead.

"I thought it was just me," Harry admitted.

"Let's open a window, then."

"Can't," Neville said. "None will open. Even the bloody drapes won't budge."

Everyone looked troubled.

“Hang on,” Harry said suddenly. “All those protective spells he put around this place... Some of them are even original! Highly dangerous, and yet we break in with minimal effort. Almost like a welcome. He’s been extremely careful about everything, so why leave the key if not by accident?”

Ron looked up. “He led us here. He Obliviates Neville but leaves the key behind? The snake *wanted* us to come here.”

“But why?”

“To play with us,” Harry said hollowly. “It’s a game to him. Let’s face it, that bastard knows more than we do at this point. He’s way ahead of us. We wouldn’t have gotten this far if it weren’t for the clues *he* left us.”

“Hold on,” Tonks said who had just come up to the group, “we still don’t know for sure if it was him who broke Azkaban.”

“Who else could it have been?” Harry asked impatiently. “Malfoy was practically the only Death Eater who wasn’t locked up. Everyone thought he was dead; dead men don’t destroy prisons.”

“Yeah, but he wasn’t a Death Eater,” Neville interjected. ‘Snape said he never took the Mark.’

“He’s as good as,” Harry snapped. “And worse.”

There was a shout from the hall, and quickly, they all made their way to the source of the noise. The guarded room had been unsealed at last, and was currently being searched when the group approached.

“Clear,” someone shouted, and they stepped in rapidly, wands still aloft.

It was a lab, Harry realized, looking around. Empty cauldrons and bottles of potions were stocked in little cabinets; some had been emptied, some were still full. Why on Earth would Malfoy need a lab? Remus was looking through the vials. Most of them were empty, Harry realized. Some of them looked like they’d always been that way, others had definitely been used.

“Veritaserum, and Amortentia over here,” Remus said, frowning. Harry’s blood ran cold. “There’s not much else, just health potions.”

“It’s an older batch,” Remus continued, looking closer. “There isn’t much left but I don’t think it’s been touched in a while.” The statement didn’t make Harry feel any better. There were more bottles similarly labeled on the table, all had been emptied and left unwashed.

“Do you think he used the Veritaserum on her?” Harry asked.

“Harry, we still don’t know if she’s been here. For all we know Hermione could have gone to hiding in the Muggle world.”

“I have proof,” Harry insisted. He showed them the hair.

“We’ll have to test it to see if it matches later,” Remus said. “But don’t be too sure, Harry. This could be anyone else.”

"I know it's her," Harry said impatiently.

"What's that?" Ron asked, pointing at something behind Harry, who turned to grab it. Turning back to face them, he slid out the small stoppered vial that had been wrapped with a small roll of parchment. The thick gloves he wore made it hard to bend his fingers, and though they kept his hands warm he found they were shaking as he looked at the tiny amount of potion still left in the glass vial.

The substance was of a thin, watery consistency, faintly coloured yellow.

"Merlin, is that *piss*?" Neville asked.

"No," Mad-Eye came forward, leaning heavily on his stump, and took the bottle from Harry, who unrolled and read the piece of parchment with a growing sense of dread. His eyes scanned the note once quickly, then again, more slowly.

I'll be waiting next time, Potter. Even then, you'll still be too late.

Harry scrunched the note in his fist. His green eyes were slits.

Ron took the note from his hand to read it. Mad-Eye was sniffing the potion.

"What is it, then?" Tonks asked.

Mad-Eye's magical eye spun wildly around the room before settling on Harry. His normal eye stared down at the floor with sudden great interest.

"Fertility potion."

No one had time to react to Mad-Eye's words. There was a loud **BANG** behind them, and they all jumped. Harry glanced back to see fire.

That's not normal fire, was all he had time to think because it was heading for them quickly, and the only thing he could say when he opened his mouth was "**RUN!**" before everything went to hell.

The garden here was bigger than the one in the other house. There wasn't just lavender here—there was chamomile, mint, basil, thyme and rosemary, more than enough to make her head swim with the strength of the combined herbal scents. Deep green ivy crawled up the wooden fence encasing the property. The surrounding land wasn't as large as it was in the other place. There was no pond, either. Hermione knew why that was.

She stared at the fence without saying a word.

Even if I reached the top, she thought, *the wards would be waiting for me there. I wouldn't be able to get one leg over before I'd find myself back on the ground.*

The Manor was cold and silent, it was a place filled with bad memories. This place was smaller, it was filled with warm light and the sounds of the birds came in through the window. The birds were kept in great cages out in the back, for they would not come when Draco was near so he had them caged instead.

Just like me, she thought.

She had been glad to leave that awful place behind, even though she hadn't known they were coming to a new place to live. Draco had been in a happy mood for once, something bright and mischievous sparked in his eyes the whole while he'd shown her around their new abode.

It was lovely, she had to admit. While she herself would never feel comfortable around Draco, she felt a little better in this house. All the windows were diamond paned except for the ones in the library. There was no stained glass window in the bedroom this time, she suspected he'd grown tired of the time she spent in that nook rather than with him, but interestingly enough the library held more than one stained glass window, perforating the great room with their beautiful rainbow light.

Hermione didn't care for the bedroom. She never would. The library and the garden held her interest the most, and those were the places she planned to spend her time now that the access had been granted to her. Draco had made up another lab for himself, and he spent many hours there, as well as in his study. Joffy cooked and cleaned and never allowed her to help, no matter how much she insisted. On their third day there Draco took her into his study to inquire if she liked the house, the garden. She answered truthfully and he was glad. He would kiss her and feel her belly, tell her some of his plans and she listened and prayed none of them would ever succeed.

There was another room, right next to theirs that Hermione refused to enter. The walls had been painted yellow, and held nothing but a small crib.

It didn't occur to Hermione until some days later to ask why they'd moved. Her mind had been too preoccupied with other thoughts, most concerning what was growing inside of her, but once the realization struck her she found herself in Draco's study, standing before his desk.

"They were coming for us."

"Sit down, please, sweetheart."

She sat stiffly. "I'm right, aren't I?"

"You're seldom wrong," he admitted. "I left them a little trail of clues, one could say, to lead them to me. I had to speed things up a little though. They *are* frightfully slow."

"Was it a trap? Did you kill them?"

"No, little bird."

"I don't believe you," she said, her eyes stared at him accusingly.

"Hermione, if I wanted them dead I'd have stayed there and formed an ambush for when they came crashing in. I could have set a deadly trap for them, if I wanted to."

"Why didn't you?"

"I need them alive," he said simply. "For now. Besides, it wouldn't be fun to kill them now before the fun's truly begun. I gave them a warning, that's all."

“That would put a damper on your mood if they died, I suspect.”

“That remains to be seen, my love.”

They fell into silence then. Draco pretended to resume reading his book and she pretended at fiddling with a skein of yarn but her eyes were not focused on her craft. He could feel her analytic gaze on him, searching for something he guessed she wouldn't find.

When several minutes had passed in this manner to no forthcoming from her he looked up at last, just as she chose to speak.

“Are you happy, Draco?”

Draco paused to close his book and set it aside, then reached to her and encircled her wrist with his hand.

“I haven't had much experience with happiness, to be truthful,” he said, tracing the blue veins that ran down the length of her forearm, ‘but with you I feel whole. I feel *this*,’ he gave her a gentle squeeze, “is right.”

He could feel how she longed to pull away but was surprised that she kept herself in place. Looking down at their joined hands, he continued.

“For a long time I thought I was incapable of feeling. The way I was raised was, if not a little grim, as fair an upbringing as one could hope for. Father and Mother hid all troubles and worries from me—there were few times in which I saw their distress since they concealed it so well but in truth, I rarely struggled with emotions. Sometimes I was inclined to think I didn't have any, or didn't experience them normally like the others around me. It never bothered me until later on, when you came along.” He pressed a reverent kiss to the pulse point on her inner wrist.

“You make me feel *pure*,” he said in a whisper, and she froze.

“*Nothing* about you is pure—not even your blood,” she replied in a harsh voice. Her nails scraped against his skin.

“You're right, but there's no denying what you make me feel, Hermione.”

She recoiled, drawing into herself. His glacial stare followed her.

“How do I make *you* feel?”

She gave him a fixed stare. The corners of her mouth tinted downwards slightly.

“You know perfectly well.”

“Unfortunately, I do.”

Before he could let her go she swiftly rotated her wrist and caught his hand in her grip in one smooth move, taking him by surprise once again. Their gazes locked, and her other hand reached up to stroke his cheek. Draco's eyes closed and he leaned into her touch.

“I hope with all my heart that one day you feel all that you've put me through. I hope you'll know what it's like to be wishing you were dead every morning, to know you'll die in the hands of a monster. I'm sure you haven't *felt* that yet.”

Draco frowned, but said nothing.

After all this time, didn't she understand? Didn't she *know*?

How well he could remember being jerked awake by his ring, pulsing so hard and strong on his finger that each beat felt like a stab, a shove. Not finding her in bed, with him, where she should have been. Running to the stairs, running, running up to the top. Seeing spots of blood along the way— her blood, from last night. How had she managed to come all this way? How had he let his guard down so easily? Feeling his insides swimming in dread and horror, the fear of being *too late*. It was the most he'd ever felt of anything in his life, and all in a span of seconds. When he caught sight of the open balcony doors the realization hit him at once and tasting vomit on his tongue he'd spun on his heel, acting on a sudden idea.

Reappearing outside, in the garden, watching her form hurtle down, faster than his eyes could follow. Hearing his own voice as if it were someone else, shouting the spell to make her stop as he rushed forward. The frantic pulsing of his heart, louder than he'd ever felt it, as she dropped into his arms gently, unconscious. He checked her pulse. Found it. Took her inside. Checked it again. Put her into bed, called Joffy for a Dreamless Sleep Potion. Checked again. And again and again.

There'd been no time to be angry. All he'd felt was a raw, desperate need to stop her. Now she was safe all he felt was a numbing relief, so great he almost dropped to his knees. She'd stayed asleep and unresponsive for four days and he'd never once left her side. He couldn't stop himself from checking her pulse. She'd suffered little to no injury from the attempt, so there was no reason to worry but he wouldn't leave her side, not even to eat.

He knew why she'd done it, and understood—he could not be angry with her for it so he was angry with himself. He'd driven her to this. It was his fault, all his. He would remedy it, he would find ways. Anything but let her go.

So he remained selfish to the core. He kept her, alive and unwilling, in his arms. Unwilling still, but at least not dead.

He sensed her warm and blooming beside him, his child growing inside her, and relaxed. Hermione withdrew her hand from his cheek, and only then he opened his eyes.

"You know there are no wards around this property," he said. "I know you think there are but that's not the case. This place isn't as big as the other one; I thought you would appreciate having the freedom to go out whenever you wish to."

Their eyes met, her eyes were full of hurt.

"You don't have to mock me anymore. I've had enough of your stupid little tests. I know I must stay here."

"No," he caught her chin with a gentle grip, "I'm being perfectly honest, Hermione. There is nothing keeping you locked inside here now. You still have the ring, of course, but if you should wish to go and walk to the nearby village or take a long walk then I will not stop you. The only protection surrounding here are two concealment charms I created. One hides this residence, as it did the other, and the second will alter your appearance when you walk past it. Only know that if trouble arises or if you are hurt I will know, and I will come. I give you some freedom, but I'll not have you taken from me."

A long silence stretched between them. Draco could see what was passing in her mind by the look in her eyes, but at last she crumbled.

"You are very thoughtful. Thank you." He sensed just when she was about to rise, and caught her in time. Luckily, she didn't need to be prompted, as she had before. Moving woodenly, Hermione returned to him and gave him a sweet kiss.

"You're welcome, my love," he murmured into her lips. She fled shortly after.

"I don't think I've ever hated anyone as much as I hate him," Ron said, pressing a cold compress against his injured arm. His bright red hair was singed on only one side of his head, and it smelt awful.

"It was a trap all along," Fred said, tending to the burn on Ginny's leg. It wasn't bad, thankfully, but the explosion of Fiendfyre had frightened them greatly. They had barely escaped the Manor when it came down.

"We're losing, Harry. He's way ahead of us and we've got nothing to go on," Neville said quietly.

"No. We know he does have Hermione."

"But not where they are now, or even if she's still alive!"

"That still doesn't mean we've lost! We need to keep looking!"

"They could be anywhere now," Ron pointed out. "Harry, mate, I think we need to stop looking for now."

"That could get his attention," George agreed.

"Then he might come to us instead," Ginny offered. "In the meantime we should prepare. He's not building an army for nothing."

Harry was floored. "You'd give up on Hermione so easily?"

"Of course not!" Ron sighed. "It's just we don't have a chance of finding her now. Later, probably, but not now, especially that Malfoy knows we've caught on to his plans. He wouldn't dare kill her, she means too much to him. Our best move is to prepare for when he decides to stop hiding."

Harry stared at them all helplessly.

They're all decided on this, he realized, and they're right. There's nothing we can do for Hermione right now. But that doesn't mean I'll stop searching.

"Fine," he said, and turned away.

There was a breeze outside, shaking the leaves of the trees and the shrubbery around her. Hermione paid it no attention.

So she was free.

Not quite in the way she'd hoped, but it was still something, and definitely better than what she'd had before. The look in his face had been earnest, but it could all still be a ruse. Her feet had taken her around the property to the front of the house, to the front gate, which was latched shut.

Go on, she urged herself. Walk out and visit the village. Keep walking and don't look back. Find someone who can help you.

Yet her feet did not move.

He'll find me, though. He said he will, and he always does. I run and I run, but he always catches me.

The enchantment he'd told her about-could she take it off, if she wanted to? Could she reveal herself to someone who might be of help?

It might just work.

There was just as much chance of her failing again, however. Who would want to help her, when they knew to what lengths the dangerous criminal turned new Dark Lord Draco Malfoy had gone to acquire her? Her arms curled around the swell of her tummy. Would they still want to help her when they found out she was carrying his child?

She thought of Harry. He would never want her now. No amount of healing would change the fact that she was pregnant by the enemy.

Will they try to take you from me? Would I allow it?

Fear gripped her, cold and fierce.

They would not easily accept me back. I'd only put them in danger, just as before. No matter what Draco claimed, they would always be in danger, and she would never be rid of him.

The gate stared back at her.

Just a few more steps and you'll be free.

But she didn't dare. She never would. It was safer to stay. It would be better if everyone just stopped looking for her-she wanted them to stay far away. She was too damaged now, they were too late, and she herself had not tried hard enough. She was not worthy of a rescue.

Hermione hung her head, turned around, and walked away.

From a window on the third floor, Draco watched avidly as his wife pondered at the gate, her shoulders heavy with the guilt that she bore. A long time she stayed, but in the end she turned and walked back into the depths of the garden, and Draco smiled.

A/N:

3/2/14

I've been working on this in bits and pieces and I've stolen enough time today to finally wrap it up. Don't give me any grief about not writing further about the war or the battle between Draco and Harry-I never intended to write it anyway. Same goes with the baby. Will it be born? Will it be a boy or girl? I haven't got a clue. Interpret it as you will but I don't quite want to hear about it.

(In case anyone's wondering, the difficulty breathing bit is one of the protective enchantments Draco put around the Manor. It slowly suffocates anyone who breaks in. (Obviously it didn't work on Neville when he was a prisoner because Draco took him there. Also no one was killed at the Manor. Everyone made it out okay but some were burned.)

Thank you for sticking with me this long; thank you for all your kind words and constructive criticism. I always appreciate it and will look forward to hearing again from many of you in my next stories.

Reviews are always welcome.

Until next time,

Charlotte

Part V

PLEASE READ THE AUTHOR'S NOTE AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS CHAPTER.

Part V

The light inside the small house was dim, and the natural light that came in from outside was hardly enough to help brighten the inside of the cottage. Inside the kitchen, a man sat at an old table, reading the Daily Prophet with haunted eyes. His hands gripped the thin bunch of papers so hard they tore and bent under his fingers.

Anniversary of the Great Battle, said the title.

Inside was a brief summary of what had happened that day, and who won.

Three years. It had been three years since and Neville still didn't want to accept the truth. Disgusted, he let the paper fall to the table, still open to the page he had been reading.

Malfoy's Triumph, read another headline. Neville had barely been able to stomach reading the glowing, gloating review of how Malfoy had sent Harry to his grave, of the rise of power that came after. He could still see it; the bodies strewn about on the grass, the swirl of black cloaks and the faces of his friends, frozen in death. Harry dropping to the ground, the last of the fight being torn out of him by that wretched green light. The triumphant, almost demonic expression on Malfoy's face, slowly turning feral as he turned to face him, who had been rushing towards him with his wand drawn, aiming for one last chance.

Neville closed his eyes. The memory played on.

He'd seen the look in his eyes, had felt the same things he was sure Malfoy had felt in that instant. No hesitation. No final words. No mercy. Malfoy had raised his wand, and opened his mouth. Neville mirrored him.

And a scream stopped them both. Surprised, they both turned. Malfoy's face grew pale with anger. Neville could hardly make out the figure that was coming towards them.

"Stop her!" Malfoy had cried, his voice distorted with rage, and Neville shielded himself in time to block the Avada Malfoy had sent that would have struck him in the chest.

Who is that? There was movement around him, and he twisted himself away, raising his shield again but the Death Eaters were not coming for him. They had caught hold of her, whoever she was, who had also run out to the center of the field and were in the process of restraining her even as she fought them fiercely with her arms and legs.

For a second his heart stopped. Luna? Ginny?

And then even Malfoy lost his patience. "Enough!" he shouted. "Bring her to me!"

Curiously, he stopped the attack, and Neville watched, horrified, as Hermione was taken to them. The two that had escorted her let her go and at once she rushed to Neville, shielding him with her body.

Malfoy laughed.

"Sweetheart," he said, "step aside."

"No."

"You realize you are already due for chastisement for what you have done. I forbade you from coming here."

"I know it," she said stiffly. "But—"

"I gave you more freedom and you show gratitude by disobeying me?"

"She doesn't owe you—" Neville began, but Malfoy glared at him.

"No one is speaking to you, Longbottom. Say another word and you will suffer for it." He turned to Hermione. "Go back home and wait for me. Nott, Parkinson, make sure she will not disobey me again."

The Death Eaters came forward, and Hermione edged away from them, pale as a ghost.

"Spare him," she said. 'All of them. Please.'

"Why should I grant you this when you throw my kindness in my face by trying to run away again?"

"I wasn't trying to run away," she said, and Neville's heart dropped at the truth in her tone.

Why not? He wanted to ask her. You could have been free.

"I came here to stop you," she continued, trying to push Neville further behind her.

"You're too late," he said, exultant. "Potter is dead."

Her face crumbled. Tears slid down her cheeks. "I know."

"Now you'll watch me kill the other one." He raised his wand.

"NO!"

"You are trying my patience today, little bird," he told her harshly. "Go home."

"Please Draco-no!" She fought against Nott, who had seized her arm. Neville Stunned Parkinson before she could come closer, and dodged Nott's Avada. When he looked back up Hermione was standing before him again, shielding him from Malfoy, who had grabbed her by the arms, crushing her between his hands.

"Spare them," she was saying, her voice thick with tears. "And I won't ever run away again. I promise."

"Don't," was all Neville managed to say before something slashed at his face and he dropped to his knees, blinded. Hermione screamed. His hand reached up to his forehead and

came back red-the blood ran down into his eyes. Two attempts at blinking restored the vision in his left eye-the other wouldn't open. He looked up, dazed.

"I swear it," she was saying, her voice wild with desperation. "I won't leave you. I'll love you, I will. Just-**please**, let him go."

No, he wanted to say, but his mouth was full of blood. No. He's taken enough from you-don't give him the rest.

Then she was helping him up, and she was crying. His blood stained her skin. He shook his head at her, tried pulling her closer to whisper something in her ear but his hands were not his own.

Through the dark red in his vision he saw the small trace of fear in her eyes but the determination in her expression trumped it as she wiped the blood from his face with her sleeve.

"I couldn't wait any longer," she whispered hurriedly, looking over her shoulder as Malfoy approached them. Her hands dug into him, seeking reassurance, he thought, but when he looked at her eyes he saw what she needed. "I tried but I broke quickly when I went back. I'm sorry." I'm **sorry**.

"S'okay," he mumbled, but his face showed the opposite. Something flashed through his mind and instantly he reached for his wand, which he had dropped when he had been cut, but it wasn't there. Dizzily, he looked up and there was Malfoy, snapping it in two. Neville's heart sank.

"It's over," he said, and let the halves drop into the grass. Neville wasn't sure if he was addressing them both or simply him. He held out his hand to Hermione.

"You won't hurt him," she said.

"No."

Neville clung to her, even when Malfoy tore her away from him but his fingers had grown clumsy and weak from the loss of blood and his hand slipped away from hers.

"My wife has requested that I spare your life," he told Neville. "But I will make no such promise for any other survivor. If I find them, I will kill them. Same goes for you if I see your face again outside of this field. Do not take my words lightly."

"I should have killed you the day I met you," Neville rasped.

Malfoy sneered. "An ambitious task for an eleven year old. Get out of my sight."

Hermione had not been allowed to say goodbye. Malfoy had caught her arms and brought them around his waist, his lips crushed against hers and she didn't fight him. When he released her she let her arms drop and wiped at her eyes. When she caught sight of Neville still standing there, torn between wanting to fight and wanting to flee, her eyes had screamed at him to leave. There was grief in her eyes but the fear showed more clearly now, and as he fled, he wondered what exactly had happened to her after she had gone back to Malfoy to save his life the first time to turn her into what she was now.

The last he had seen of his best friend, she had been staring into the field where Harry's body lied, her brown eyes vacant and tortured as Malfoy barked something to his followers.

Who else had survived? It was hard to say.

Fred and George had disappeared. He hardly remembered seeing them during the battle. Dolohov had killed Ron and would have done the same to Ginny, if Neville hadn't killed him first. Ginny had been trying to protect Professor McGonagall, who was already dying at that point. Ginny was still living in the Burrow, but the last time he'd tried to visit it he'd found the place uninhabited and empty. What happened to the others he couldn't remember. Some had disappeared before the last battle; during missions and other attacks, perhaps the rest had been taken prisoner, but he wasn't sure Malfoy had the patience for that.

He had found Luna, wounded but alive, crouched beside Tonk's body. There was a Death Eater he didn't recognize lying dead some feet away, his face slashed so deeply all facial features were rendered unrecognizable. They had left immediately-defeated, injured, and hopeless.

They couldn't even go back for the bodies. When they tried the next day they found it was guarded by Malfoy's followers even though the area had been cleared. What Malfoy had done with the bodies of his closest friends and allies, Neville would never know.

Strangely, they were left alone after that. Neville had feared Malfoy would have his people hunt them down but nothing happened. Day after day passed and they stewed in fear, worrying about the others. They never received word from any of them but Ginny, who assured them she, Fred and George were well and hiding in Shell Cottage with Bill and Fleur. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were staying at Aunt Muriel's. The letter included an invitation for Luna and Neville to join them there but Neville declined.

Things didn't start changing until later on; and everything happened so slowly and subtly that one hardly noticed it. Except Neville knew Malfoy and had kept his eyes and ears alert since the day he had last seen him. The first was Malfoy's rise in power. That came as no surprise. Neville combed through the Daily Prophet every day, hoping for word of Hermione, but she was rarely ever mentioned in the publication. His eyes would hover over the obituaries, wondering if-when-he would ever read her name there. Once they had included a photo of her and Malfoy, standing outside the lobby of the Ministry of Magic. The background was full of smiling faces. Dedalus Diggle stood beside Hermione, looking at her as if she were a complete stranger though Neville knew they'd met before from some of Harry's stories. His eyes were full of fear and betrayal. Malfoy wasn't smiling but his eyes looked directly into the camera, challenging and cold and smug. Hermione was looking away, lips set in a half grimace. She held herself stiffly, with Draco's arm around her waist. It almost looked like she was trying to get out of the frame.

Neville had expected there to be an outcry afterwards-demands of Malfoy's arrest, a brief column detailing the reappearance of Hermione Granger, but there was nothing. Malfoy boasted her on his arm like he had never kidnapped her and then hid her from the world for so long a time. That people were surprised was evident-betrayed, too. He heard whispers after that; people whispering horrible things about his former best friend, and he often had to remind himself they didn't know what really happened. But he did. Every now and then he

envisioned himself coming forward with the truthful account, seeing Malfoy clapped in irons and sent to Azkaban, or better, being killed on the spot.

But he knew all too well that look in Malfoy's eyes in that strange photograph.

Try and stop me, it said.

It was injustice. It was unfair to the extreme and horribly sickening that he could get away with it so brazenly. But he did, and no one could do anything about it because he was the most powerful man in Britain now. Gone was Harry, gone was Dumbledore, and gone was Voldemort. Now an even worse man had taken his place, his power, and there weren't many people left who could fight him.

Luna had woken-she walked into the kitchen, her dreamy eyes still fuddled with sleep, and sat down opposite him on the table, taking his clenched fists in her hands.

"It's time to go," she said.

It was a fine morning, just the way she best liked them. The sky was riddled with bright clouds, the humidity gone and the heat was no more than a whisper carried faintly in the sweet breeze that swept through the throng. She had chosen that morning to wear one of her old tea dresses-a faded white thing with a blue floral print on it, and a light cardigan over it for when the temperature took a dip, if it was so inclined today.

The streets here were uneven, just as she remembered them, twisting and turning through the small and well-populated village. There were more hills than streetlights; she had focused on the tightness of her calves as they had made their walk to the outdoor market.

The hearty, cheerful cries of vendors announcing their wares rang from every direction like church bells, and the fleeting glimpses of shoppers' faces flashed through her vision like the fluttering pages of a flipbook-dark skin, an untrimmed beard, a child's smile, a grim mouth, a pair of arresting dark blue eyes.

The bells-the real church bells-began to strike and she leaned against the church wall briefly, setting down her paper bags onto the cobbled street. There was another couple a little farther up ahead, but they stood with their backs to her and she was not quite in the mood for conversation, so she kept her eyes focused on the square.

This vacation had been her husband's idea-not that she was against vacationing at all-but she hadn't agreed with the timing. She wasn't superstitious by any means but they had just received the news from her exam the week prior, and she had secretly thought it was the wrong time to be out and about, traveling. A woman her age, pregnant and roaming around rural France... she'd known she would have to be very careful concerning this pregnancy-gone were her prime years and all that.

You're not that old, she told herself firmly. *So shut up*. And she did.

The breeze ruffled the skirt of her dress and cooled her aching legs, which was a welcome relief. Hearing something to her left, she looked there and accidentally caught eyes with one of the two strangers there. It was the man with the dark blue eyes-he was frowning, and staring at her. He looked surprised to see her, which was strange because she was positive

she'd never seen him in her life. His gaze was intense, scrutinizing her features and she frowned at him. As she watched, an incredulous smile formed on his lips. An uneasy feeling crept over her and unconsciously, she pulled her hand up to her round stomach and stepped away, breaking eye contact.

Surprised with herself, she looked around the area again. *Where in the devil has he got to now?*

She reached into her purse, looking for her mobile when two approaching strangers caught her attention and she looked up.

Some part of her had expected it to be the blue-eyed man, but the one who stood there had eyes that were exact copies of an icy, churning ocean. She wondered if his eyes had changed in the light-it must have been so, for his features were the same. The lovely woman at his side; her eyes were dark brown, and curiously, brimming with tears.

Her breath caught in her throat. The younger woman held a close resemblance to her own deceased mother; those eyes, the shape of the face, even the hair. As far as she knew she had no living relatives in France; but here by some strange stroke of fate she had found a doppelganger of her own mother.

"It is so lovely to see you again," the young woman had regained her composure, and stepped swiftly forward to embrace the older woman, pregnant and very, very confused.

Words came out of her mouth; unplanned, unknown, but heartfelt-so much so that she felt her voice shake.

"I've missed you very much, my darling."

The embrace grew tighter, and Monica Wilkins, formerly Mrs. Granger, brought her arms up to encircle the stranger, one hand rubbed circles onto her back. The stranger shook harder.

When it was over the young woman pulled away, and smiled.

"I love you," Monica told her, stroking the younger woman's cheek.

Throughout the whole exchange the tall blond man had watched from where he stood, making no attempt to introduce himself but strangely, it didn't bother her. His strange eyes were full of sadness but when he looked at his partner they glowed with adoration and Monica felt herself relax slightly. In the years to come Monica would find herself wondering who he was exactly, and why he was so sad.

Monica watched them leave, her vision blurred with tears. A hand, familiar and warm, grasped her shoulder gently. Her husband. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said, wiping her eyes. "She's kicking, is all." She didn't question why she didn't tell him what had really happened. Strangely, the memory was already fading from her mind. The harder she grasped at it, the less she remembered.

"If it hurts too much we can go sit in that park over there," he said, squinting as a sudden wash of sunlight brightened the scene.

"I'm fine, Wendell," she said, and stooped to pick up her bags but he beat her to it. "Shall we go home?"

“Whatever my lady desires,” he said complacently, and they set off.

“Why did you do that?” she asked him, her voice shaky from her tears. “Why?”

Draco took her to the side, into the shadows, and held her to him. Hermione lost the control she had barely maintained over herself, and let out a strangled sob into his chest, clenching the fabric of his shirt in her fist.

“I was as surprised as you are,” he said soothingly. “I would have asked you beforehand, little bird. That was fate.”

The words remained unspoken, but he sensed she was thankful he had not introduced himself to them as her husband. Even if they wouldn’t remember who either of them were, he knew she would be glad to have at least that little piece of her life that remained untouched by him; something that remained pure. His fingers brushed away her tears and she acquiesced.

Still, he had to ask.

“You’re sure-?” *You don’t want them in your life?*

“Yes,” she said, wishing she had the strength to say the opposite. But the desire remained.

I don’t want them to see what I’ve become. What he’s made me into. I don’t want him to hold them over me too.

“Take me back. Please, Draco.”

“To them?” he turned to look for the departed couple, searching in the dense crowd.

“No,” she said. “Take me home.”

A/N:

Ok so this last part has been around for a while. The idea for this actually came to me right after I posted part four but I didn’t want to rush it so I let it sit for a while before actually writing and posting. I was a little dubious about posting it here so I posted it instead on my AO3 account but it’s been a few months and I changed my mind.

For clarification: The battle between Malfoy and Harry happened about a year after the previous chapter. The Order is dead; the surviving members are few and scattered around. Draco and Hermione actually live near that little village Hermione’s parents were vacationing in, which is why they were there. Neville and Luna are moving to America. If you recall, his gran is still there.

FURTHER CLARIFICATION: The pregnant woman in the middle part of this chapter is Hermione’s mother. Hermione is not pregnant again FYI. The whole middle part is in Mrs. Granger’s POV (or I should say Monica Wilkins, as that’s the name she lives under now since Hermione wiped her parent’s memories). She and her husband (Hermione’s dad, duh) are shopping at an outdoor market and her husband has gone off somewhere while she takes a breather in the shade. Draco and Hermione are under

disguise (remember that protective ward Draco told Hermione about in Part 4? they're under disguise when Mrs. Granger first sees them (which is why Draco has dark blue eyes-she only sees Hermione from the back) but after she and Draco see each other and he realizes who she is, Draco takes off their disguise so Hermione can greet her mother properly for the first time in years. Hermione is understandably upset, but doesn't expect her mother to answer back the way she did ("I've missed you so much, etc"). That part was Draco's doing. He lifted the Obliviate long enough for Mrs. Granger to say hello to her long-lost daughter.

(I know that probably isn't possible to do with the Obliviate spell but this is my story and I'm taking liberties, thank you very much.)

I know a few of you were thinking that Draco made Hermione into a Horcrux. I did toy with the idea for a very long time, I tried writing it in but it never quite fit or made much sense so I've left it out. Maybe one day I'll come back to it and make it work in this story but for now it's not a concern of mine. I know I didn't mention the baby but it's alive and well; they left him in Joffy's care while they walked to the village. I might be writing a tiny piece on that in the future but as of now it's not likely since there's other things that I am working on.

Thanks for reading!